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Journal
Verge: Studies in Global Asias, 6(1)

Author
Espiritu, Yen Le

Publication Date
2020

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YẾN LÊ ESPIRITU AND J. A. RUANTO-RAMIREZ

The Philippine Refugee Processing Center: The Relational Displacements of Vietnamese Refugees and the Indigenous Aetas

ESTABLISHED IN 1980, the Philippines Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) on the Bataan Peninsula served as the most prominent transit center for almost all of the Southeast Asian refugees making their way to permanent resettlement in America. By the time the PRPC closed in 1995, approximately four hundred thousand Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong refugees had transited through it before resettling in the United States (Barr 2011). The story of the PRPC is often told as one of international cooperation to ease the acute "Boat People" crisis: the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) administered the center; the United States provided most of the funds for establishing and maintaining the center;[1] and the Philippines donated the land on which the center was built. While other works have critically examined the humanitarian claims touted by the UNHCR and the United States,[2] this article assesses the role of the Philippines as land donor in the PRPC international partnership. Specifically, it focuses on a largely hidden fact of the Marcos government's "donation" of land for the construction of the PRPC: the eviction and relocation of the Aetas,[3] members of the Magbukún tribe of Negritos believed to be the first inhabitants of Morong, Bataan (Tebtebba Foundation 2008, 17–18; Cruz and Romero 2012, 5).

By focusing on the PRPC and the relational displacements of Vietnamese refugees and the Indigenous Aetas, this article merges and extends the fields of critical refugee studies and settler colonialism studies. Using the lens of critical refugee studies, it shows how the Marcos government's motivation to host Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s derives from its need

to project itself as a liberal democracy to divert attention away from its much-maligned martial law policies. But this is an incomplete story. Drawing on settler colonialism studies, the article points out that the Marcos regime's ability to recast itself as a humanitarian state required not only the refugee figure but also Indigenous land. This productive convergence of critiques—critical refugee studies and settler colonialism studies—is enabled by the article's focus on a non–Global North postcolonial nation. By underlining the mythologies of rescue and benevolence deployed by the Philippines, a Global South nation, the article disrupts the focus on Global North resettlement countries that typifies much of the work in refugee studies. And by highlighting the ongoing displacement of the Aetas in the postcolonial Philippines, it exposes the settler disavowal that collapses histories of genocidal violence and dispossession of Indigenous peoples into a story of "postcolonial 'survival'" (Day 2019, 7). Methodologically, the article relies on Yến Lê Espiritu's analytical technique of *critical juxtaposing*: "the bringing together of seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories, and spaces in order to illuminate what would otherwise not be visible" (Espiritu 2014, 21). In critically juxtaposing displaced Vietnamese refugees and the dispossessed Aetas, this article makes visible both the geopolitical violence that accompanies refugee aid and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous land and peoples in postcolonial nations. In short, the relational displacements of refugees and Indigenous peoples, when refracted against one another, expose the ongoing and linked effects of global militarism and settler colonialism.

CRITICAL REFUGEE STUDIES: MARTIAL LAW, HUMANITARIAN CLAIMS, AND THE PRPC

The interdisciplinary field of critical refugee studies reveals how imperial and militaristic projects often masquerade as refugee aid (Espiritu 2014; Nguyen 2012). In *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es),* Espiritu (2014) argues that the figure of the Vietnamese refugee, the purported grateful beneficiary of the U.S. "gift of freedom" (Nguyen 2012), has been key to the (re)cuperation of American identities and the shoring up of U.S. militarism in the post–Vietnam War era. Indeed, the image of thousands of Vietnamese risking death to escape "communism" and resettle in the United States appears to affirm the United States' uncontested status as a nation of refuge (Espiritu 2014). However, in reality, the granting of refugee status to displaced Vietnamese was a highly contested and protracted process, with first-asylum countries in Southeast Asia—designated a "dumping ground" for unwanted refugees—bearing the brunt of the work. As the number of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian

arrivals spiked and resettlement offers from Western countries slowed, first-asylum countries in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, refused to accept additional refugees unless they received substantial assistance from the UNHCR and wealthy Western states (Barnett 2001, 255). The PRPC was thus a burden-sharing humanitarian project cobbled together by three differently positioned stakeholders, with the Philippines—and not the United States—playing a key role in the management of the refugee crisis (Sahara 2012). While refugee resettlement in Western countries has continued to receive the most public attention and praise, the PRPC case reminds us that it is countries in the Global South that have hosted the majority of the world's displaced refugees, oftentimes acting as buffer states that keep refugees from migrating to the Global North (Arar 2018).

In April 1975, with South Vietnam on the verge of collapsing, the U.S. Department of Defense, which was in charge of transporting the evacuees, designated Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines the first refugee "staging area." Owing to its prominence and proximity to Saigon, Clark was deemed an ideal temporary housing place for Vietnamese evacuees to complete necessary screening and paperwork (Moos and Morrison 2005, 33). U.S. selection of Clark AFB was steeped in U.S. colonial rule of the Philippines: during the Cold War, Clark grew into a major American air base; at its peak, it had a permanent population of fifteen thousand, making it the largest American base overseas (GlobalSecurity.org 2011). However, on April 23, 1975, fearing that the Vietnamese "would be there forever" (Thompson 2010, 63), President Ferdinand Marcos unexpectedly announced that the Philippines would stop accepting refugees (Moos and Morrison 2005, 33; *New York Times* 1975). And yet, fewer than five years later, on July 21, 1979, at the two-day, fifty-three-nation conference on Southeast Asian refugees organized by the UNHCR, a Marcos government representative announced that the Philippines would establish a processing camp to house up to fifty thousand refugees (Mullen 1979). This turnabout was not inadvertent but took place against the backdrop of two critical events: the widespread opposition to Marcos's imposition of martial law on the Philippines (Pangilinan 2014, 37; Wurfel 1977)[4] and the crisis of the Vietnamese boat refugees, whose migration was at its highest in 1978 and 1979 (Smith 1978).

On September 21, 1972, Marcos proclaimed a state of martial law in the Philippines, citing the existence of a "communist threat" led by the Maoist New People's Army and the armed "rebellion" of the Mindanao Independence Movement (Wurfel 1977). Condemnation of the Marcos dictatorship was swift and widespread, spilling into the Filipino diaspora. Through countless forums, marches, rallies, and press conferences, Filipino

American activists denounced the incarceration, torture, and execution of political dissidents in the Philippines.[5] International leaders and human rights organizations also rebuked the Marcos regime. Between 1973 and 1978, representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, and the International Commission of Jurists conducted multiple investigations and issued highly critical reports on the status of the country's civil and political rights (U.S. Department of State 1980). The Marcos government's mounting human rights violations also frayed Philippine–American relations. In the wake of the widely considered fraudulent National Assembly elections in the Philippines on April 7, 1978, which was accompanied by raucous demonstrations and mass arrests, Vice President Walter Mondale considered bypassing Manila on his trip to Asia. In the end, to avoid jeopardizing the negotiations for the continued American use of Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay Naval Base, Mondale visited Manila but distanced himself from Marcos by "avoid[ing] an overly close endorsement of Marcos and the election" (Smith 1978).

Just as the Marcos regime faced rebuke from Western nations for its human rights abuses, a dramatic surge of Vietnamese "Boat People" hit Southeast Asia. In fact, Mondale's 1978 trip to Asia included negotiations with several Southeast Asian countries for sustainable solutions to the Boat People crisis. By that time, more than sixty thousand Boat People had taken refuge throughout Southeast Asia, overcrowding already packed refugee camps (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] 2000, 82). In some countries, such as Malaysia and Thailand, boat "pushbacks" had become routine (Stein 1979; Mullen 1979). Charging that Western countries' resettlement offers had not kept pace with the refugee tide, the five member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand—refused to accept any new arrivals (UNHCR 2000, 83). With the principle of asylum under direct threat, the UN secretary general convened a two-day international conference in July 1979 in Geneva on "refugees and displaced persons in Southeast Asia." It was at this conference that Carlos Romulo, foreign secretary of the Philippines, made the surprise announcement that "his nation would establish a processing camp for 50,000 refugees," a most welcome offer in a region where Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand had threatened to "push back" Vietnamese refugees seeking shelter (Mullen 1979). Romulo's offer was met with "loud applause" and generated "the only visible sign of emotion" from conference attendees (Mullen 1979). Richard Holbrooke, U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, personally praised President Marcos for embracing the UNHCR's priorities and mission: "I think it is

a very important gesture and opponents and supporters of the Marcos Government alike should feel proud of the actions of their Government and their country" (*New York Times* 1979).

Holbrooke's recasting of the Marcos government from a much-maligned martial law state to a government of which both "opponents and supporters . . . alike should feel proud" crystalizes the ideological role that the figure of the refugee plays in recuperating illiberal nations that claim the mantle of humanitarianism. Marcos's offer to host a refugee processing center diverted attention from his regime's legitimacy crisis, confirming that humanitarian efforts are often practices that "work principally to recuperate state sovereignty in the face of specific historical challenges" (Soguk 1999, 189). On August 21, 1979, one month after the Geneva conference, Marcos issued Executive Order 554 to establish a Task Force on International Refugee Assistance and Administration, pronouncing the Philippines as a nation that acts "as a responsible member of the United Nations" and "in accordance with simple humanity" to "render assistance in the processing of refugees specially from Vietnam."[6] The opening of the PRPC also recuperated the personal image of the Philippines' First Couple, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, as compassionate and merciful Christians. Amid the country's political turmoil and the couple's plummeting popularity, the widely circulated image of smiling refugees presenting flowers to President Marcos and his wife and welcoming them to the PRPC telegraphed refugee gratitude and the couple's Christ-like generosity (Figure 1).

On February 21, 1981, in a carefully staged event designed to cement the Marcoses' reputation as devout humanitarians, Imelda Marcos invited Pope John Paul II to visit the PRPC during his trip to the Philippines. When the Pope celebrated Mass at the camp, he publicly thanked the Philippines and its people for their compassionate assistance to the Vietnamese refugees, thus consecrating the Marcoses' humanitarian credentials (Orejas 2011). Once established, the PRPC became an ongoing symbol of Philippine benevolence and liberal democracy on the world stage. In 1988, as the PRPC entered its eighth year of operation, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article effusive in its praise of the Philippines. Titled "Manila's Refuge Makes It 'Pearl of the Orient,'" the article hails the Philippines for its "warm hospitality and genuine concern," "selfless generosity," and "genuine care, patience and faith" in "offer[ing] Indochinese refugees a precious opportunity to begin rebuilding their shattered lives and to regain their human freedom and dignity" (Applegate 1988).

It is important to note that as the Marcos regime was earning praise from the outside world for its compassion toward Vietnamese refugees,

Figure 1. President Marcos and First Lady Imelda greeting newly arrived Vietnamese refugees.

its own martial law was forcing hundreds of thousands of Filipinos, many of whom were Indigenous, to flee their homes to escape government persecution and violence. Marcos's decision to host Vietnamese refugees thus enabled his regime to conceal, or at least underplay, the Philippines' own "refugee problem." The Philippine government's war against the Moros in the south displaced between 72,000 and 150,000 people, the majority of whom were Muslim and fled to Malaysia, the nearest Muslim country. According to representatives of the UNHCR, the refugees congregated primarily in the state of Sabah, where they comprised most of the construction workforce and lived in shantytowns near their building sites (Kamm 1979). Filipino dissidents who fled the Philippines to escape

Marcos's totalitarian government, or who were already in the United States when Marcos declared martial law, also claimed refugee status. Because of their anti-Marcos activities, these dissidents applied for political asylum in the United States, arguing that they would be jailed or persecuted if they were to be returned to the Philippines. In an open letter published in the *Los Angeles Times,* Filipino dissident Hermie Rotea decried the lack of support from the State Department and the Immigration Service: "It is paradoxical that while the United States feels morally obligated to accept thousands of political refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia, the State Department and the Immigration Service discriminates against Filipinos already in America who have sought political asylum after the declarations of Philippine martial law in September 1972. . . . Does denying political asylum to refugees, other than Vietnamese and Cambodians, jibe with the true American spirit?" (Rotea 1975).

Using the lens of critical refugee studies, this section has shown how the Marcos regime diverted attention from its martial law tactics and human rights violations by repositioning itself as a magnanimous rescuer of refugees—a decision that was widely lauded and financially supported by Global North nations. As a former colony of the United States, the Philippines' offer to host a refugee processing center for Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees—the spoils of U.S. wars in Southeast Asia—can also be read as a form of postcolonial striving in which the Marcos regime sought legitimation from the United States by replicating and affirming U.S. mythologies of rescue and benevolence.[7] As such, from a critical refugee studies perspective, the PRPC indexes the multiple legacies of U.S. military empire in Southeast Asia that connects Vietnam and the Philippines.[8] However, critical refugee studies, with its focus on U.S. imperialism and militarism, does not address the realities of settler colonialism in the Philippines. The next section thus traces the history of settler coloniality in the postcolonial state of the Philippines, whose geopolitical structure enabled the eviction of the Indigenous Aetas from Sitio Lemon.

SETTLER COLONIAL STUDIES: SETTLER COLONIALISM IN "POSTCOLONIAL" PHILIPPINES

In a public address on the eighth anniversary of the PRPC, Philippine secretary of foreign affairs Raul S. Manglapus linked the experience of the Vietnamese Boat People to that of Filipinos' ancestors who were once boat people themselves, "having arrived on this archipelago's shores in their barangay . . . more than 1,000 years ago in search of a better life and a new nation" (Applegate 1988). Manglapus's attempt to link Vietnamese and Filipino histories via their perceived shared hardship as "boat people"

glossed over the Indigenous communities who were already there when the Filipino "boat people" arrived. More pointedly, it failed to mention that the Marcos government evicted the Indigenous Ayta community from Sitio Lemon to make way for the construction of the PRPC that housed the Vietnamese Boat People. Highlighting the eviction of the Aetas changes the PRPC story from one about accepting refugees to one about displacing Indigenous peoples, that is, from one about humanitarianism to one about settler colonialism.

Settler colonialism refers to a gradual process of state-supported demographic expansion over Indigenous territories, often by disavowing the historical claims of Indigenous populations to their ancestral lands in the name of national interest, security, or development. Land acquisition is central, as "settler colonialism seeks to replace the natives on their land" (Wolfe 2001, 868). Scholars of settler colonialism have largely focused on settler states that are bound to Western colonial forms and that involve white settler subjects, overlooking the question of settler coloniality in postcolonial states (Byrd 2011; Day 2019; Wolfe 2001). Indeed, postcolonial theory is seldom applied to the study of postcolonial nations in Southeast Asia (Raffin 2008). Following Christopher John Chanco (2016), we contend that settler coloniality is not bound to colonialism proper or to privileged white settlers but is part and parcel of the violent processes of the consolidation of state sovereignty. Unique to the settler colonial condition is the centrality of state-backed policies of population transfers and land acquisition and the realities of dispossession and displacement of Indigenous minorities (Chanco 2016). At the same time, it is important to note that not all settler states are equivalent and that postcolonial settler states continue to be structured by their colonial pasts. Having endured close to 350 years of combined Spanish and American colonialism, the postcolonial settler state of the Philippines institutionalizes Indigenous policies that are yoked to and circumscribed by the settler practices of their former colonizers. Owing to the complex conjuncture of Spanish and U.S. colonial rules, Philippine conceptualizations of Indigenous populations, who represent about 10 percent of the Philippine population, continue to be "contingent, heterogeneous, and conceptually unstable" (Casumbal-Salazar 2015, 76; Hirtz 2003). As Casumbal-Salazar (2015, 78) contends, "scholars of the Philippines and its diasporas have not settled on a lexicon that accounts for the difference between the Philippine Indigenous subject under colonialism and the Philippine Indigenous subject today."

Spanish and U.S. colonial governments in the Philippines created their own racial categories that cumulatively defined Filipino national identity in contradistinction to the Indigenous, which repeatedly stripped Indigenous

populations of their political claims to land and government resources (Martinez 2004; Kramer 2006). Spanish and U.S. colonial administrators bifurcated the Philippine populations into "converted souls" (Christians) and "infidels" (non-Christians), a racial demarcation that continues to haunt the image of the Indigenous and Muslim in the Philippine postcolonial state. Under Spanish colonial rule, techniques of subjection distinguished between *indios,* the colonized and Christianized peoples of the north, and *infieles,* the unsubjugated and mostly Muslim inhabitants of the southern islands (Warren 1981, 165ff.). U.S. colonial authorities reproduced this distinction to consolidate a "bifurcated racial state" that subjected Christian and non-Christian populations to different forms of state regulation, then *territorialized* this bifurcation through the creation of a Mountain Province for Igorots and a Moro Province for Muslims (Casumbal-Salazar 2015, 78–86). American military rule in the Muslim south was punctuated by brutal pacification operations mixed with pronounced pious paternalism. In all, American forces killed at least three thousand Philippine Muslims between 1903 and 1906 (McKennan 1998, chapter 5). The ultimate goal of the American colonial authorities was always the formation of a single Philippine nation-state, which necessitates "the incorporation of all other nations into a settler colonial state space" (Chanco 2016, 13).

In 1913, in an effort to Christianize Muslims, the American colonial government began to sponsor agricultural colonies in Muslim Mindanao, constructed as an untamed frontier, to encourage Christian settlement in the region. With the establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935 and the creation of the Philippine republic in 1946, state-facilitated population transfers were accelerated through settlement policies that encouraged, and at times financed, the relocation of mostly Christian populations "perceived best capable of bringing into rein the violent and rebellious space" of Mindanao—an effort by the transitional Philippine postcolonial nation-state to consolidate its sovereign legitimacy (Chanco 2016, 9; McKennan 1998). Successive Philippine governments systematically resettled large numbers of Christians in Mindanao, rewarding settlers with the best of the agricultural lands that had been usurped from Indigenous groups. Since Indigenous peoples did not practice Western notions of landownership and thus had no formalized claims to their ancestral lands, Filipino settlers from Luzon and the Visayas were given land titles to what both American and Philippine colonial governments deemed "unused" lands. President Manual L. Quezon, who served as president of the Commonwealth of the Philippines from 1935 to 1944, introduced the Koronadal Land Settlement Project, which initially allowed 2,000 individuals to "resettle in the island of Mindanao," to be

followed by 250 additional settlers per month—a policy so central to his presidency that Quezon announced it in his 1940 State of the Nation Address. One year later, Quezon inaugurated the Office of the Commissioner of Mindanao and Sulu, whose role was to oversee the "settlement of Mindanao" via the creation of "agricultural colonies," a policy change that was also publicized with great fanfare in his 1941 State of the Nation Address. President Elpidio Quirino, who served as the sixth president of the Philippines, from 1948 to 1953, declared Mindanao an important part of the Philippine "empire" (Quirino 1949). In 1951, as part of the Philippine "settlement project," Quirino approved the settlement of 1,686 settlers plus their dependents in various provinces in Mindanao. In his 1952 State of the Nation Address, Quirino exclaimed that "the great purpose of this project . . . is to vouchsafe to each man a place of his own." Quirino's exclamation underscores the fact that Filipino citizens who deserve "a place of [their] own" are sociolegally defined to be Christian Filipinos from the northern region (Martinez 2004, 109–46).

The Philippines' relationship with Mindanao and Sulu cemented its identity as a Christian-dominated settler colonial state. The impact of the rapid influx of mostly Christian settlers into Muslim and Lumad[9] territories was devastating, resulting in the gradual displacement of Mindanao's Indigenous populations and the conversion of Muslims into a minority (Chanco 2016, 11). Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the thirteen Indigenous groups known collectively as the Moro (or Muslims) composed 90 percent of Mindanao's population. By 1976, after three generations of U.S. and Philippine settler policies, nearly three-quarters of Mindanao's population were first- or second-generation immigrants from the neighboring islands, the vast majority of whom were Catholic (Werning 2009). Christian in-migration severely disrupted the Muslim south, culminating in widespread antagonisms between Muslim nationalists and the Philippine state and eventually erupting into a Muslim armed rebellion against government forces (McKennan 1998). In the westernmost provinces, the politically organized Moro population launched a vigorous separatist movement that exploded in 1972; it was partly this Moro uprising that propelled Marcos to impose martial law on the Philippines that year. Even before the war peaked in 1974–75, one out of every three Muslims had been left homeless as a result of government efforts to crush the rebellion (Chanco 2016, 12). In 1976, in Tripoli, the Marcos government reached an agreement to begin formal talks with the Moro National Liberation Front to implement an autonomous government for the thirteen Muslim-dominated provinces, which temporarily quelled the rebellion (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 63–65). When Marcos did not follow

through with the agreement, fighting renewed between the Philippine military and Moro as well as Maoist rebels under the Communist Party of the Philippines' New People's Army. By 1979, tens of thousands had been killed, and the government's own figures reported 1.1 million refugees displaced from more than a million hectares of land in the southern Philippines (Chanco 2016, 12).

In the northern Philippines, the Magbukún Aytas of Bataan in Luzon, a group of the larger Aeta community found throughout Luzon, remain one of the most isolated and least documented Indigenous groups in the Philippines. For many Filipinos, the Aeta, sometimes known as Negritos, represent the most "savage" and "non-civilized" peoples of the Philippines (Martinez 2004, 265–67). Believed to be the oldest living descendants of the original inhabitants of the Philippines, the Aetas repeatedly clashed with settlers who claimed large tracts of their land, with neighboring communities who waged wars and attacks against them, and with government forces who wanted to relocate and settle them (Cruz and Romero 2012, 5; Stankovitch 2008, 330). A seminomadic group who depended mainly on hunting and gathering as a way of life, the Aytas, who used to live along the shores of Morong, were pushed higher and higher up the mountain slopes of the Mt. Natib mountain range due to increasing non-Indigenous encroachments (McHenry et al. 2013, 6). In 1945, when the Bataan National Park (BNP) was established as a protected area of the Philippines in the mountainous interior of Bataan, the Philippine government halted the Aytas' seminomadic lifestyle and restricted their settlement to Sitio Lemon (Stankovitch 2008, 330). Prohibited from roaming the forest to hunt and gather food, the Aytas had to learn to cultivate crops and raise animals for farm use; women became domestic workers for nearby non-Indigenous families (Tebtebba Foundation 2008, 17). Like other nomad groups, the Aetas' nomadic lifestyle racializes them to be temporally at a prehistorical stage of human development, as a people who have insufficient attachment to place and who move too much to be able to cultivate agricultural property (Volpp 2015, 297).

In the late 1970s, First Lady Imelda Marcos, charged with looking for a suitable place to house the Vietnamese refugees, recommended the rural region of Sitio Lemon. To carry out this recommendation, the Marcos government ejected the aboriginal Magbukún Ayta tribe from Sitio Lemon to make way for the PRPC, which occupied 365 hectares of land in BNP (Stankovitch 2008, 330). The construction of the PRPC disturbed the ancestral burial site of the Aytas, flattened the spring that once served as their water source, and destroyed their nomadic lifestyle and hunting and gathering traditions (Tebtebba Foundation 2008, 17–18).

As with other settler colonial projects, the operation of PRPC from 1979 to 1994 dispossessed the Indigenous Aytas but benefited Filipino settlers who descended on Sitio Lemon from different parts of the Philippines, particularly from Samar and the Bicol Region, for economic opportunities. With 100 percent of the funding coming from the UNHCR, whose primary donors were the United States, Japan, West Germany, and Norway, the flush-with-cash PRPC—charged with not only housing and maintaining the refugees but also offering them pre-resettlement orientation, language instruction, and job training—provided professional and relatively well-paid jobs for thousands of Filipino settlers over the years (Fasick 1981). In the PRPC's first year of operation, its administrator alone had a working staff of 186 Filipinos to establish operational policies and procedures, develop budgets, and coordinate all assistance to refugees (Fasick 1981). To save money, U.S. State Department officials decided early on to rely heavily on local Filipino teachers to staff the English as a second language program (Fasick 1981). According to a *Los Angeles Times* report, in 1988, the PRPC employed twelve hundred teachers and staff, "who are all Filipinos trained intensively in American culture both by their upbringing in the former colony and by the 100 or so American supervisors who oversee the classroom instruction" (Fineman 1988). In addition to teachers, the PRPC needed staff to service the many needs of the four hundred thousand refugees who cycled through the center, from cooks to jail keepers to medical personnel to daycare providers to driving instructors. Filipinos who worked at the PRPC gained not only a good income but also pride and accomplishment for being affiliated with the "'show-place' refugee camp of Southeast Asia" (Mortland 1987, 386). A former social worker at the PRPC recalled how "exciting" it was to work alongside so many international volunteers: "I came from a small town in the Philippines. Then all of a sudden, I was working with Americans, with Australians, with Canadians. . . . I felt so important and learned so much."[10] In contrast, for the few displaced Aetas who worked at the PRPC, there was no prestige; they remained largely invisible and received no public recognition, even though they were doing a lot of the instrumental work behind the scenes—basic ground cleaning and debris collection—for the PRPC's upkeep (Tebtebba Foundation 2008).

Filipino settlers also came to Sitio Lemon to launch business ventures. Prior to the construction of the PRPC, wildlife abounded in the thick forest of the lower hills of Morong. Once Filipino settlers arrived, they converted the lowland forest around BNP to lucrative farmland to produce and sell crops to the PRPC. As the PRPC operations wound down in the late 1980s and eventually stopped in 1994, many settlers

departed, leaving behind a denuded land prone to yearly grassfires. Those who remained in the area competed with the Aytas for wild animals and nontimber forest products. These settlers engage in a number of activities that damage the remaining forest: they make up the majority of those who are involved in illegal logging; they decrease the number and size of bee colonies by overharvesting honey; and they overcut smaller trees for charcoal making, which prevents the growth of forest trees to maturity (Cruz and Romero 2012, 7).

This section has shown how refugee studies scholars need to be attentive to the geopolitical structure of settler colonialism. Highlighting the displacement of the Aeta communities changes the PRPC story from one about humanitarian settlement of refugees to one about the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Making visible the Philippines' status as a settler colonial nation illumines Indigenous histories, cultures, and losses that have often been collapsed into a unified Philippine "postcolonial" national identity. In the next section, on Asian settler colonialism, we discuss how refugee resettlement is always conditioned by and through settler colonialism.

ASIAN SETTLER COLONIALISM: INDIGENOUS AND ASIAN DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES

While settler colonial studies tend to focus on the opposition between white settlers and Indigenous people, we situate this article in the growing body of literature that addresses the intersections between Indigenous and Asian diasporic communities (Lo, Chan, and Khoo 2010, xxi; Day 2016). By mapping out the triangulation of Indigenous, refugee, and settler positions, we contribute to the vibrant debate on the vexed role that non-Indigenous migrants of color play within a settler colonial framework. At the heart of this debate is whether settler identity is predicated on the intentionality of migration; that is, are forced migrants—enslaved people, indentured laborers, displaced refugees—also "settlers," despite the involuntary context of their migration? Patrick Wolfe's (2013) answer to this question is unequivocal: "settler societies, for all their internal complexities, uniformly require the elimination of Native alternatives" (257). As such, the fact that some settler groups immigrated against their will does not change the structural reality that their presence contributes to the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous people (Wolfe 2013, 263). Candace Fujikane (2008) is equally emphatic about Asian settlers in Hawai'i, maintaining that all Asians, including Southeast Asian refugees who had been displaced by U.S. military intervention and occupation, are settlers who participate in and benefit from the ongoing U.S. colonial

subjugation of Hawaiians. Extending this argument, Dean Saranillio (2013, 286) outlines how Asian settlers' political and economic empowerment in Hawai'i is gained at the expense of Native lands and sovereignty and calls on Asian settlers to remove themselves as agents in the settler colonial system of violence.

Taking a different approach, Jodi Byrd's (2011) critique of settler colonialism accounts for the structures of coerced migration. To distinguish the involuntary migrant from the settler, Byrd offers the term *arrivant* to "signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe" (xix). Iyko Day (2016) joins Byrd in complicating the Native–settler binary, arguing for a triangulation of Native, settler, and "alien" subject positions, with *alien* referring to the racialized migrant on whose labor settler capitalism relies. In so doing, she illuminates the historical relationship that African slaves and Asian migrants had to North American land, which was as an "exclusive and excludable labor forces" (24). In differentiating *alien* from settler migrations, Day offers a productive way to theorize the intersections of white supremacy, settler colonialism, capitalism, and immigration in North America, one that recognizes that "land and labor are constitutive features of heterogeneous processes of settler colonial racialization" (25). Both Byrd (2011) and Day (2016) concur that awareness of the divergent conditions of voluntary and forced migration does not absolve the "arrivant" or the "alien" from participating in a settler colonial structure that seeks to eliminate Indigenous people. However, they contend that folding involuntary migrants into a generalized settler position "constrains our ability to understand how their racialized vulnerability and disposability supports a settler colonial project" (Day 2016, 21).

Despite the fact that refugees and Indigenous groups are both displaced populations, scholars seldom discuss them in relation to one another (Coleman 2012). Evyn Lê Espiritu (2018) is the first scholar to conduct a book-length study of the figure of the refugee settler; her work examines the presence of Vietnamese refugees in Guam and in Israel–Palestine, two sites of settler colonialism and U.S. empire. Extending the discussion on the complicity of the Asian "settler" in structures of settler colonialism, Lê Espiritu defines the "refugee settler condition" as the positionality of refugee subjects whose very absorption into a settler colonial state is predicated on the unjust dispossession of an Indigenous population. Although Vietnamese refugee settlers are not directly responsible for settler colonial policies in Guam and Israel–Palestine, Lê Espiritu argues that they nonetheless benefit from these structures of elimination that respectively dispossess Chamorro and Palestinians. We concur with Lê

Espiritu's argument about refugees' complicity with settler colonial logic. When refugees argue for their rights to asylum, citizenship, and property in a settler colonial state, they are in effect affirming the national sovereignty of that settler state, thereby erasing Indigenous presence, sovereignty, and claims to the land there. In most instances, the refugees' new home—whether in the form of detention camp, processing center, or residence—is built on Indigenous land that had been aggressively acquired by imperialist movements and sustained by a settler colonial state. As Leti Volpp (2015, 292) succinctly states, "the nation-state in which an immigrant seeks membership relies tacitly on the dispossession of already existing populations."

Regardless of their intent or choice, Vietnamese refugees who transited through the PRPC participated in and profited from the ongoing appropriation of Indigenous land by the Philippine postcolonial settler state. Following their eviction, the Aytas moved across the Batalan River and dispersed to different locations in BNP for several years before settling in the village of Kanawan, which looked across a small valley to the PRPC (Cruz and Romero 2012, 5). Although Kanawan and the PRPC were separated by just a stream and a hanging bridge, the disparities in the living conditions between the two communities were stark. According to a World Relief worker who lived in the PRPC in the 1980s,

> the Aeta of Kanawan looked across the valley to PRPC, a community of many thousands of refugees that had running water, electricity, dozens of classrooms, a hospital and neighborhood medical clinics, gas station, post office and many churches. They had none of these things. They'd once lived on the land that the Philippine government gave so generously for the care and training of Indochinese refugees. This gift deprived the Aeta of the resources of that land, including large mango trees and a valuable harvest. They moved across the valley. In their new location, they were even further from the elementary school in Morong, down the hill from PRPC about 5 kilometers. In the rainy season, children stayed home as it was too hard to walk the daily round trip of 14 kilometers. (Blair 2013)

These disparities underscore the fact that as refugee settlers in Bataan, the Vietnamese directly and amply benefited from the Philippine government's displacement and dispossession of the Indigenous Aeta community. As such, any discussion of the PRPC, and of refugee resettlement more generally, needs first to center and address Indigenous loss and dislocation from the land (Justice 2018, 12; Phung 2019, 23).

Moreover, for the Vietnamese refugees, their stay at the PRPC was a temporary stop on their way to resettlement in a Global North nation;

for the Indigenous Aytas, their eviction from Sitio Lemon was largely permanent. With the decrease and degradation of their forest cover, and the ensuing destruction of their nomadic lifestyle and hunting and gathering tradition, the Aytas are considered to be among the most disadvantaged Indigenous people of the Philippines. In 2010, their earnings of $1.21 per day per person barely reached the upper boundary of the extreme poverty level (Cruz and Romero 2012, 7). The 1997 landmark Indigenous People Rights Act (IRPA), which restored the rights of some fifteen million Indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands, had limited benefits for the nomadic Aeta tribes, whose forest settlements had shrunk significantly due to rapid urbanization. Even as late as 2015, a mere 180 titles have been granted, with some five million other claims still being processed. Roman King, leader of an association of Aeta communities, sums up their dire situation: "We were the first peoples of the Philippines, but now we are aliens in our own country" (Agence France-Presse 2016). In June 2018, after fourteen years spent on "preparing the claim, presenting proofs, producing evidences, as well as researching the tribe's genealogies and checking available historical archives," the Magbukún Ayta tribe finally received final approval from the National Commission on Indigenous People on their claim for ancestral domain over some twelve thousand hectares of land. However, for the Aytas, having recognized right over their ancestral lands does not mean an automatic return to their nomadic lifestyle. Instead, given their dire economic situation, the Aytas are partnering with the Subic Indigenous People Assistance Group to formulate a joint management agreement with the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority for the *development* of Aeta lands covered by the Subic Freeport, a special tax- and duty-free economic zone (Sapnu 2018).

CONCLUSION: CRITICAL REFUGEE STUDIES MEETS SETTLER COLONIALISM STUDIES

The interdisciplinary field of critical refugee studies conceptualizes "the refugee" not only as an object of investigation—that is, not only as a stateless figure or a nationless subject—but as a site of social and political critique whose emergence, when traced, critically exposes the linked processes of U.S. imperial, military, and state violence that brought such displaced subjects "into being" (Espiritu 2014). This article contributes to critical refugee studies by moving the focus from refugee resettlement in the Global North to refugee work in the Philippines, a Global South country. Tracing the routing of Vietnamese refugees through the Philippines, this article has shown how President Ferdinand Marcos's commitment to the PRPC has enabled his government to tout its humanitarian credentials

while deflecting attention from its own persecution of Filipino political dissidents and creation of Filipino refugees. Moreover, as a former U.S. colony, the Philippines' putative humanitarianism could also be read as an effort to court U.S. approbation by replicating U.S. imperial strategies of rescue and benevolence. As such, the figure of the Vietnamese refugee constitutes a critical lens through which to make visible the Philippines' efforts to reposition itself not as a maligned martial law regime but as a magnanimous rescuer of refugees displaced by U.S. wars in the region.[11] Indeed, the Philippine government's consent to temporarily house and prepare the refugees for immigration to the United States enabled the United States to fulfill its rescue fantasies. The PRPC case thus confirms Espiritu's argument that in many instances, the refugee constitutes a *solution* rather than a *problem* for the statist practices and goals of host countries (Espiritu 2014).

However, critical refugee studies, with its focus on imperial and militaristic projects, does not generally account for the land dispossession that is part and parcel of refugee resettlement; this nonrecognition of settler colonialism enables the ongoing settler disavowal of "the historical claims of Indigenous populations to their ancestral lands" (Chanco 2016. 1). The PRPC case highlights the need for activist-scholars always to be attentive to the geopolitical structure of settler colonialism. The Marcos regime's ability to recast itself as a humanitarian state required not only the refugee figure but also Indigenous land. To "donate" the land needed to construct the PRPC, the Marcos government evicted and relocated the Indigenous Ayta people from Sitio Lemon to Kanawan. The displacement of the Aeta communities needs to be traced back to the complicated geopolitical structure of the Philippines as a settler colonial state. Highlighting the seldom-told eviction of the Ayta changes the PRPC narrative from one about accepting refugees to one about displacing Indigenous peoples, a reminder that the resettlement of refugees relies tacitly on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Volpp 2015, 292). As such, the PRPC case makes visible the Philippines' status as a postcolonial settler nation that has long subjugated its Indigenous peoples, thus calling into question the assumed homogeneity of the Philippine national body politic, which has been achieved in large part by collapsing Indigenous histories, cultures, and losses into a unified "postcolonial" national identity.[12] In short, merging critical refugee studies and settler colonialism studies illumines the fact that refugee resettlement is always conditioned by and through settler colonialism.

As "displaced subjects," the refugee and the Indigenous together have the potential to make visible the urgency of unreconciled histories of

global human rights violations, which generate forced displacement, incarceration, segregation, dispossession, and separation of families as well as the ongoing failures of international humanitarianism to fully redress these violations (Oikawa 2006, 23). The forced displacement of the refugee and the Indigenous person thus exposes the interrelationship of militarism, colonialism, and imperialism—in this case, the multiple legacies of U.S. military empire in Southeast Asia that connects Vietnam and the Philippines. At the same time, the stark disparities in life conditions between the PRPC's Vietnamese refugees and the displaced Aytas remind us that it is crucial to see the refugee and the Indigenous person as relational but not equivalent, given that the refugee is often a privileged legal subject in comparison to the Indigenous person. As Volpp (2015, 299) provocatively points out that "it is not evident why a removal from one particular piece of land does not wreak the same kind of violation of justice that a transfer to another country might when these first inhabitants might not have any particular attachment to the nation-state boundary that has been created by this new state." Indeed, while the three primary solutions to the "refugee crisis"—repatriation, integration into the first-asylum countries, or resettlement in a third country—affirm that the refugees properly belong in a nation-state, the primary logic of settler colonialism is one of elimination of the Indigenous. Given the facts of settler colonialism, as Malissa Phung (2019) has suggested, resettled refugees have the responsibility to actively identify themselves as "uninvited guests" in Indigenous territories, to acknowledge the debts that they had incurred by living in and off these territories, and to center and address Indigenous loss and dislocation from the land.

Yến Lê Espiritu is Distinguished Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego, and a founding member of the Critical Refugee Studies Collective.

J. A. Ruanto-Ramirez is a PhD candidate in cultural studies–American studies at Claremont Graduate University. He is the coeditor of *Nexus: Complicating Community and Centering the Self* (2015).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article has been partially funded by the UCSD Academic Senate and the University of California Office of the President (UCOP). We thank the Critical Refugee Studies Collective for their input and support and Gabriel Lê Espiritu for his assistance with archival research.

NOTES

1. Total U.S. contributions to the PRPC were $15 million: $9 million for construction and $6 million for first-year operations (Fasik 1981).

2. Since the mid-1990s, a growing number of scholars had mounted a sustained critique of international humanitarianism, detailing how it is a deeply political project that often ends up affirming empire (Macrae 1998). In a critical geopolitical study of the UNHCR during the 1990s, Jennifer Hyndman (2000, 147) claims that international humanitarian acts function at times as "neo-colonial technologies of control." Critical refugee studies scholars have likewise disputed U.S. claims of rescuing and caring for refugees, emphasizing instead the role that U.S. foreign policy and war played in inducing refugee displacement in the first place (Espiritu 2014).

3. We use the term *Aeta* instead of the Spanish and American colonial racialized category of *Negrito* as the contemporary accepted term to refer to the aboriginal peoples of the Philippines. The name "Ayta" is specifically used to identify the Aeta communities of Central and Southern Luzon, specifically those in the Bataan and Pampanga regions. In this article, we will refer to those from Bataan as Ayta and the overall community as Aeta.

4. As the human rights violations escalated, domestic and international human rights critics launched a public and widespread denunciation of Marcos's dictatorship, charging that the imposition of martial law was a ploy to extend Marcos's term in office, just as he was more than halfway through his second, and constitutionally final, four-year presidential term (Wurfel 1977).

5. As an example, on July 13, 1980, at a forum sponsored by the Seattle Anti–Martial Law Coalition (AMLC) and Friends of the Filipino People, Sister Marianni Dimaranan, a former political prisoner under Marcos's dictatorship and head of a religious support group for political prisoners and their families, informed the attendees that since 1972, at least fifty thousand political prisoners have been arrested and tortured and an unknown number of dissidents have been subject to extrajudicial killings and torture (*International Examiner* 1980).

6. https://www.lawphil.net/executive/execord/eo1979/eo_554_1979.html.

7. We thank a *Verge* anonymous reviewer for calling our attention to this argument.

8. Filipino scholar Luzviminda Francisco (1973) has linked the U.S.–Philippine War of 1898 to the U.S.–Vietnam War, branding the former a brutal war that killed 250,000 to 1 million Filipinos and led to U.S. occupation of the Philippines and as "the first Vietnam."

9. *Lumad* is the collective term used by the various non-Muslim and traditionally non-Christian tribes of Mindanao Island.

10. Interview conducted by Yến Lê Espiritu, Philippine Refugee Processing Center, May 21, 2014.

11. It is interesting to note that during the war in Vietnam, the U.S. military employed the Aeta, famous for their jungle survival skills, to train American soldiers to hone their survival competencies in mountainous and forested areas in a tropical region before they left for combat in Vietnam (Waddington 2002).

12. As an example of its "postcolonial rebranding," which necessitates replacing Indigenous identity with a national Filipino identity, the Philippine Congress established the Commission for National Integration in 1957 to "effectuate in a more rapid and complete manner the economic, social, moral and political advancement of the Non-Christian Filipinos" (Congress of the Philippines, House of Representatives, 1957, Republic Act 1888).

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